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FAKE RUG AUCTIONS.

ONCE upon a time a remark was made by Phineas T. Barnum, to the effect that the greater the swindle the more willingly the public will patronize it. The great showman's cynical utterance was not without truth, and year after year dishonest businesses spring up, for a while flourish, then languish, to be succeeded by others equally dishonest. Within recent years all reputable firms engaged in the importation of Oriental carpets and rugs have been disturbed over mock auctions or "fake sales" of rugs. To such a proportion has this particular form of swindle been extended that an organization called The Society for the Suppression of Fraudulent Auctions has been called into existence, for the protection of merchants who conduct their establishments upon legitimate methods. In the store of a regular dealer the buyers have an opportunity at least of knowing what they are buying, while the purchasers at so-called rug auctions are doing what at best is not much better than investing in a lottery ticket, and at the worst, imposing upon themselves the rôle of a countryman in a "skin game."

In the matter of floor coverings, the householder who elects to supply his domicile in this direction with Oriental rugs solves the carpeting problem for a lifetime, and there is scarcely a house of any pretensions to-day wherein some examples have not found a place. The admirable wearing qualities and rich appearance would have caused them to leap into popular favor did they not also possess another excellent quality, that of falling into harmony with almost every decorative scheme. This fully deserved appreciation and the general adoption are what have led many swindlers to embark in the rug action business and prey upon confiding citizens. With some honorable exceptions, the auctioneers who sell rugs at retail to the general public are rather a slippery lot. The usual method employed to foist these rugs upon the purchaser is by holding auction sales, either in stores that are vacant and can be rented for a few days, or in the department stores of firms who do not understand the imposition these itinerant dealers seek to practice. The "Oriental merchant" and his American understudy, who usually poses as the "going, going, gone" man, advertise extensively in such papers as will accept their announcements. One or two good rugs are usually hung upon the walls in a conspicuous place, and they not infrequently have "ribbons," that are supposed to represent prizes won at exhibitions, while the other rugs constituting the stock, are not freely displayed, but put near the platform of the auctioneer, and can generally only be seen by gaslight. When the hour for the sale begins the clerks and satellites of the swindler-in-chief bid vigorously, and sooner or later an outsider drifts into the contagious atmosphere of the "connoisseur's" enthusiasm, and enters into the competition for possession of what he believes to be a very fine Oriental rug. The bidding is brought up to a handsome figure by the "puffers" and "cappers," and the stranger within the gates finds the rug knocked down to him. Once sold, the rug is quickly packed, payment made, and the happy customer congratulated upon his "bargain." Apparently the more ridiculous the statement made about a rug, the more readily does the story obtain credence, and the daring and assurance of the unscrupulous vendors are most remarkable. For rugs that would be dear at \$10, these dealers frequently ask \$50, accompanying the demand by a brazen falsehood, that "it once belonged to the Shah's harem," or "it was secured by bribing the muzzin of an old mosque."

Many of the modern rugs, woven by the poorest workmen, colored with the cheapest dyes that produce colors crude and harsh, are treated with a chemical preparation, composed of a solution of borax and caustic soda in water, to mellow the tones and produce the effect of an antique. This is generally followed by a bath of tersulphate of iron, with the final result, after a short use, of the disappearance of all color, and the destruction of the fabric as well. People pay exorbitant prices for rugs therefore that quickly fall apart, and instead of attributing their unfortunate experience to their own stupidity, decide never to buy a rug again. The lesson to be learned is to buy rugs only of merchants or auctioneers of established reputation. It may be borne in mind that it costs a good deal to sell by auction in a legitimate way, for auctioneers receive ten per cent., advertising costs ten per cent. more, and the freight charges for conveying goods from town to town increase the expense of conducting the business by honest methods, and itinerant dealers make their profits by selling far above values. It takes years to acquire real knowledge of the value of rugs, and while there are reputable auctioneers, generally well known and respected in the cities in which they conduct business, the wandering rug minstrel is usually a pleasant but deceptive singer, and as his lay can only be hearkened unto at heavy expense, it should be avoided by those who want genuine goods.

ADA CRISP.

Periodicals.

In *The House Beautiful* for May (Herbert Stone & Co., Chicago), there appears an excellent article by Horace T. Carpenter on "An Artist's Home," being an illustrated description of the domicile of Daniel C. Beard, in Flushing, L. I. This cozy nest appears to be an ideal contrivance, in absolute good taste—not always found in an artist's abode—and those ingenious conveniences which remind one of *multum in parvo*.

The May number of *Brush and Pencil* calls attention to a charming stranger in the art world, who has come to abide with us: Pyrography. An article from Earl H. Reed gives some good technical explanations of this peculiar art. "The Twelve Landscape Painters" are also discussed, not, however, with those critical conclusions to which I could in all cases subscribe. The closing sentence of the article is, however, so true that I like to repeat it. "Conventional treatment has been the death of all the schools of art heretofore, and if we want to have a strong, true American school, our artists have all the science necessary, and they need only to go to Nature and court her with all the enthusiasm of an ardent lover. American art is something already to be reckoned with, and the men who are making themselves famous while developing it are the ones who are faithful, honest, and true to themselves and their native environment."

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The Temple Magazine for April contained an interesting article from the pen of that well-known writer, the Rev. F. Hastings, on "Remarkable Continental Pulpits," in which one is described which some years ago I greatly admired while in Brussels. It is the *chaire* in the Cathedral St. Gudule, carved by Verbruggen, which represents in carved wood the expulsion of our first parents from Eden. Various kinds of animals among the foliage are sharing the pain of the first transgression, while the angel with flaming sword is closing the gates of paradise. Above is the Virgin with the child, who crushes the head of the serpent with the cross.

Foreign Notes.

The point made in the last number about the appropriate connection between the Corot and the Impressionist Exhibitions in the Paris Galleries of Durand Ruel, I find also brought out in an article in the *Figaro* of April 21st, by Arsène Alexandre, just received, which space forbids me to republish.

Le Temps, of the 17th of last month, calls attention, in connection with this exhibition, to the lack of representation which the luminarists have found in the Luxembourg, where, as a demonstration of contemporary art, they certainly should find a place.

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The third volume of Professor Bode's "Rembrandt" published by Sedelmeyer of Paris is nearly ready for publication. After correcting the final proof-sheets the learned Berlin director proposes visiting Florence.

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Dr. Theodore Wiegand has been appointed "Departmental Curator of the Royal Museums of Berlin," with an official residence at Constantinople. This post, which was originally founded in Smyrna for Karl Humann in 1884, has been reconstituted in order that the interests of the Berlin Museums in fresh Oriental discoveries may be cared for by a resident expert with a definite position.

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On the 12th of April, died in Paris the famous decorative artist Auguste Alfred Rubé, the *doyen* of his profession. He had attained to eighty-two years, and was distinguished chiefly by his decoration of theatres, in which, for nearly half a century, he had no equal, while, largely in conjunction with M. Chaperon, he worked with great success at the Opéra, Opéra Comique, Comédie Française, and Odéon. His last work is the curtain of the Nouvel Opéra Comique.

* * *

A private society in France has offered to advance a sum of money sufficient for the erection of a new building in place of the present Luxembourg Gallery, which is in a deplorable condition. The only condition asked of the Government is that a small entrance fee be charged on two or three days of the week until the sum expended has been refunded to the lenders. The present building was originally an orangery, and is, according to M. Ralf Derechef, utterly unsuited to the requirements of a picture gallery. It stands on a level with the ground and is roofed as a hot-house; it is therefore

damp in winter and far too hot in summer. Twenty years here would be sufficient, he says, to ruin a canvas, "and although," he adds, "there are many monstrosities in the Luxembourg of which it would be a pleasure to chronicle the demise, there is a sprinkling of masterpieces which it would be a crime to allow to deteriorate."

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The Italian law as to the expatriation of Works of Art does not seem to be very stringent just now, as two important works have recently migrated beyond the Alps, viz., the polyptych of the XV. century from the Church of San Sisto at Viterbo, a masterpiece of the early Sienese School, and the bust of Bindo Altoviti, by Benvenuto Cellini, which had been chained to the wall of the reception-room in the Altoviti Palace by order of Pope Pius VII.

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In connection with the celebration, on June 6th, at Madrid of the third centenary of the birth of Velazquez, an exhibition will be held containing either the originals or copies of as many as possible of the great painter's works. At the same time there will be unveiled a statue of Velazquez, placed before the front entrance of the Prado Museum in the Calle Felipe IV.

* * *

J. J. Henner, the famous painter of the Woodland Nymph and member of the Institute, has been named a member of the Council of National Museums of France to replace Count Delaborde, resigned.

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A disgraceful act of vandalism was recently committed at Saint-Maurice, near Charenton, where thieves have disfigured the monument erected in "La Place" of Eugene Delacroix. The palm and palette of solid bronze, which ornamented the column, have been stolen, while the thieves were interrupted in their removal of the bronze bust of the famous painter, which crowned the column. Steps have been taken by the police of Charenton and Paris to discover the perpetrators of this crime.

THE ARTISTIC ATMOSPHERE OF ANTWERP.

HERE are a few remarks reminiscent of happy days spent in the Academie des Beaux-Arts and studios of Antwerp just five years ago.

As things have changed very little since then, these jottings may be of interest to any one on the look-out for an inexpensive art training combined with congenial surroundings.

The old Art School of Antwerp, founded by David Teniers (the younger) in 1664, used to be somewhere near the Bourse; but in 1804, an old Franciscan monastery in the Rue du Fagot was bought and converted into what is now known as the "Academie Royale des Beaux-Arts d'Anvers."

The school is supported by the State, and is free to all comers. There are no fees of any kind, but in consequence of this the rules of the Academy are very strict, and the free-and-easy, sing-song, smoke-laden atmosphere to be found in the "paying schools" of Paris and elsewhere, is not to be found in Antwerp. In place of this, there is more of a Board School feeling: rather irksome to the artistic temperament, but all the same good for hard work and quiet thinking.

Student life is, with the English at any rate, a very busy one. The hours spent at the Academy average eight per diem, but in addition to this the studious members usually get up amongst themselves a "sketch club."

A large room in some convenient café is generally engaged for their meetings, where they choose their own models and work in any medium they please. This, from nine to eleven, three nights a week, besides outdoor sketching between whiles, makes up a fairly busy time.

Every student of art who has been to Antwerp within the last eighteen years must remember "Old Thielen," the *surveillant* of the morning painting classes. He is a good sort at heart, but with an aggravating sense of duty which compels him to put down his foot (a fair-sized one by the way) on all singing, smoking, larking, and everything but work.

Mynheer Thielen does what an American student once described as "a lot of hard 'sitting.'" Added to this, his life is spent in "hanging around" and looking at his watch, for he has to keep the models' time and tell them when to "pose" or "rest."

He sighs very heavily at times, chews tobacco, and often wears a worried look.

"Thielen" was apparently, to the new-comer, the most important man in the Academy.

Of course there were "M'sieu" le Directeur, Albrecht de Vriendt, a most unpopular man, and the popular Prof. Van Havermaet, or "Old Van," as he was familiarly called.

"Old Van" could speak English with a quaint accent, and had

mastered the art of sarcasm to a degree which made many a sensitive student squirm, while the others smiled.

Poor "Old Van" is dead now, and doubtless the Academy feels his loss considerably.

Besides the school life there sometimes occurs a reunion of old students, who come back to the artistic atmosphere of Antwerp, and "set up" for a time in studios to study in private.

The accompanying photos were taken at the studio of "Mynheer" Hassall, whose daily afternoon teas "*met cooksies*" were always a "rendezvous" for all comers, and when amongst discussions artistic the possibilities of the *Poster* were often brought forward.

A good little studio may be had there for about £20 per annum, and amongst other advantages apartments are cheap, most of the students being able to rub along on £1 per week.

The photo of Indians and cowboys was taken shortly after the Carnival of 1894, in which the English students played a prominent part, carrying off the second prize for the finest costumes. The costumes in this group are all "home made."

We must not forget to mention one of the, to students, institutions of Antwerp, Madame Van Roosmolen, who keeps a large store of artists' materials, and whose "Magazyn" close to the Academy is daily filled with a medley of nationalities; but her softest side is possibly towards the "Ingleshmanner," with whom she is a general favourite and known as "The Antwerp Mother of the English men."—*From the Poster, London.*

The photographs above referred to appear in the April number of this interesting monthly, but can naturally not be reproduced in this paper.

ART IN RUSSIA.

THE traveller who for the first time finds himself upon the soil of Russia will not fail to be struck by the total dissimilarity of its ecclesiastical edifices from the architectural forms which have been accustomed to meet his eye in western Europe. The clusters of small green or golden cupolas, and the domes of bulbous shape, with their surmounting Greek crosses, cutting the sky with the graceful curves of their outline, though at first a sight entirely new, will become to him a familiar object before he has travelled many hundred versts over the vast plains from which they rise. But if this novel feature is presented by the most conspicuous monuments of the land, no less difference is found in genuine Russian domestic construction. While the streets and the secular buildings of the largest towns offer no striking contrast to the cities of central Europe, being, indeed, for the most part imitated from them, the wooden buildings, which may be said to be the national domestic architecture, have for the visitor a character of novel and peculiar interest. The proportions, variety of shape, and elegance of the wooden villas, and the elaborate lace-like fringes of open woodwork which depend from the eaves, the pendants, and finials of fanciful design, bring out native talent, and show that the rustic population is not without artistic perception. The borders, too, woven into the white linen which forms so conspicuous a part of the Little Russian costume, offer genuine examples of native Art, while this costume itself (which a few years ago was the object of a fashionable revival, and was worn as a summer dress by ladies of the highest circles) is one of the most graceful and becoming of any in Europe. More ancient far than these are the vestiges of Scythian Art which may be seen in the rich and interesting collection of ornaments, chiefly of gold, preserved in the Hermitage.

The bulk of this most interesting collection is the result of discoveries at Kertch, on the Cimmeric Bosphorus, in the museum of which town are also a large number of these relics. Kertch was the ancient Panticapæum, the most opulent of the Greek colonies upon the Euxine, and the style displayed upon these ornaments is distinctly the classic Art of ancient Greece; many specimens, indeed, might have come from Athens herself, so excellent are they in execution and design. These objects may perhaps have been the work of Greek artists of Panticapæum. Other samples, especially those found farther inland, display less of the Greek style, but exhibit representations of domestic usages of the ancient Scythians, or figures of imaginary animals, and this admixture of barbaric Art, while diminishing their artistic merit, invests them with high archaeological interest. The inland finds, and especially the ornaments discovered in Siberia, are ruder, but of unrivalled massiveness, gold being comparatively plentiful there. Strabo describes the Scythian warriors as wearing belts and head-bands of gold, and as having the bits and martingales of their horses made of the same metal.

Religion and Art have in Russia, as elsewhere, usually gone together, and been exponents of each other. This was everywhere the case until the time of the Renaissance, and Russia felt the influence of the Renaissance less than any of the great European nations. The Russian Church is the daughter of Constantinople, and Russian